

VZCZCXRO8531
RR RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHGI RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEH KI #0368 1031608
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 131608Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9479
INFO RUCNSAD/SADC COLLECTIVE
RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE

UNCLAS KINSHASA 000368

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [TSPA](#) [EAIR](#) [PREL](#) [KSCA](#)
SUBJECT: PRIVATE DRC COMPANY LAUNCHES 750KG ROCKET

¶1. (U) A private Congolese company based in Lubumbashi, Developpement Tous Azimuts (DTA), successfully launched the fifth prototype of its "Troposphere" rocket from the Bateke plateau near Kinshasa on April 12. Local press reported the 5-meter long, 750 kilogram rocket reached an altitude of 36 kilometers in 85 seconds, though this has not been confirmed. Of the four previous attempts, DTA succeeded in launching rockets to altitudes of only 1 kilometer (2007) and 1.5 kilometers (2008). The spokesman for DTA, Jean Patrice Keka, said the successful test means the company can move into the second phase of its program with the objective of launching the first Congolese satellite into orbit. GDRC Minister of Scientific Research Joseph Lititiyo announced the event in advance on television, attended the launch, and pledged during the closing ceremony to establish sources of public funds to support similar scientific research projects.

¶2. (SBU) Comment. If DTA's rocket indeed reached an altitude of 36 kilometers, the DRC would still be a long way from developing the capacity to put a satellite into orbit. The former Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research had also expressed an interest in USG support for a Congolese space program in 2008, but Post generally supports economic programs with more of a focus on poverty reduction, macroeconomic stability, or improvements to the investment climate. Congolese scientific advances, such as hosting the continent's first nuclear reactor in the 1970s, remain an important source of national pride, though reported results or benefits to the Congolese people may far exceed the cost. End comment.

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